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ABSTRACT

A unit for teaching writing to senior high school students is described in this brief article. AUTHOR'S COMMENT (excerpt): I have used the following exercises to help writing students develop a stronger sense of audience. The sequence of activities is divided into three phases--prewriting, drafting, and rewriting--and a fourth phase of publishing activities is added. During the prewriting activities, I make appointments for the writers to read their drafts to children in grades K-3, the age of the audience for whom they are writing. The writers then use the feedback from the readings to make their final revisions. At least eight class periods are needed, and there are also homework assignments. One of the activities for the prewriting stage is to rewrite one of Aesop's Fables changing the setting to a definite time and place, changing animal characters to human characters, creating an appropriate conflict, and adding details, dialog, and suspense. The "drafting" activity includes planning, writing, and editing a story. Rewriting and adding pictures is the third stage. "Publishing" (Xeroxing) and "binding" in folders conclude the exercise. (KC)

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Writing for a Real Audience

Shirley Nelson, South Royalton High School, Vt.

Level:
Senior High School

Author's Comment:

I have used the following exercises to help writing students develop a stronger sense of audience. The sequence of activities is divided into three phases—pre-writing, drafting, and re-writing—and a fourth phase of publishing activities is added. During the pre-writing activities. I make appointments for the writers to read their drafts to the children in grades K to 3, the age of the audience for whom they are writing. The writers then use the feedback from the readings to make their final revisions. At least eight class periods are needed, and there are also homework assignments.

Pre-Writing

First class period: Whole class activity—analyze SMASHED POTATOES: A KID'S EYE VIEW OF THE KITCHEN, by Jane G. Martel. In these children's writings, find and discuss examples of repetition, simile, kinds of details, rhyme, author's attitude and interests—such as personalizing things and events, and faith in parents. Analyze one of Aesop's Fables in the same way, using school library books.

First homework assignment: Re-Write one of Aesop's Fables.

Changes to make:
- Change setting to a definite time and place.
- Change animal characters to human characters.
- Create a conflict appropriate to characters and setting.
- Add details, dialogue, suspense.

Second class period: Small group to whole group activity—in groups of three, analyze rewritten fables for the above list of changes. Each group chooses one fable to share with the whole class. Successes are noted by students and teacher.

Drafting

Second assignment: Plan a story for children between the ages of five and eight.

Guidelines:
- Topic—should interest children in grades K-3, as noted in pre-writing activities.
- Setting—either ordinary, or magical, or a combination.
- Characters—not more than three or four, either animal, or human, or both.
- Plot—simple and repetitious
- Magic—animals and plants can talk.
- Moral—intrinsic to the story, not at the end.
- Style—short sentences, simple and colorful words, dialogue.

Third class period: Editing workshop. Each student edits three peer stories. Prepare in advance edit slips that list the guidelines, as well as a checklist of mechanical skills, for the student editors.

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Re-Writing

Fourth class period: Stories are returned to writers with the edit slips of peers and teacher attached. Re-writing begins in class.

Fourth homework assignment: Re-draft the stories and add pictures. Writers can either draw their own pictures or ask someone else to read the story and illustrate it.

Fifth class period: Appointments have been made in advance for the writers to read their re-drafts to children in grades K-3. Two writers go to each classroom. The host-teachers help their children offer suggestions about story and pictures. Writers have been prepared to ask questions about what the children liked, disliked, and understood about both stories and pictures.

Fifth homework assignment: Make a final, typed draft of the story. Try to use suggestions made by the children. Illustrations should be added to the manuscript as it is typed.

Publishing

Sixth class period: Typed manuscripts with the illustrations inserted are shared with the writing class and then submitted to the teacher for evaluation. Last changes/corrections are made.

Sixth homework assignment: Student volunteers Xerox all of the stories. This takes several days.

Seventh class period: Students collage the stories into booklets and bind them in file folders with large paper fasteners. An autographed copy of the booklet is presented to each class by the writers who visited earlier. Member of the writing class are given booklets for their own use, and autographed copies are given to the school library and to members of the school administration.

Feedback and reactions to the booklets are posted in the writing classroom. On one occasion, the students were invited to an elementary school in a neighboring town. There they were the guest-authors for an "I Love to Read Day" celebration.